

Making Building Retrofits With Energy Efficient and Renewable Technologies Easier

By Dean Niemeyer
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The Greater Cincinnati Energy Alliance (<http://greatercea.org/>) is a non-profit organization that provides educational, project management, and financing services to retrofit buildings with energy efficient and renewable technologies, and is primarily focused on the residential and small commercial sectors. The organization was incubated by grants from the Greater Cincinnati Foundation and Duke Energy Foundation and is now funded in part through Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants from Hamilton County and the City of Cincinnati in Ohio, as well the cities of Covington and Florence and counties of Boone, Kenton, and Campbell in Kentucky.

The first step is to help consumers understand the importance of energy efficiency, and to equip them with the tools they need to move through the process of retrofitting their home or building. GCEA educates consumers by partnering with neighborhood organizations to conduct door-to-door canvasses and community meetings. Upon the customer's approval, a free or heavily subsidized energy assessment will be performed and then the customer will be able to select efficiency measures to invest in, which includes things such as duct sealing, insulation, HVAC, and appliances. GCEA will further invest its funds to buy down the cost of the project, along with providing certified contractors to perform the work. This effort is a complement to low-income weatherization providers such as the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency and People Working Cooperatively, as residents up to 200% of the poverty level qualify for their services, and GCEA starts at that level to provide a continuum of services to rest of the residential sector.

GCEA helps building owners by making energy efficiency easy and affordable through innovative financing programs that include the Hamilton County Home Improvement Program Loan (HIP) and Eco-Link loan through the State of Ohio. GCEA leverages these financing programs with Duke Energy rebates; local, state, and federal tax incentives, as well as its own funds, and the goal of the financing solution is to have the energy savings pay for the debt service. In other words, a resident makes a \$5,000 retrofit in their home and finances it with a low-interest loan that leverages all other incentives – and they are able to save more on their utility bill in month 1 than they are paying back to the bank for the loan.

Investing in energy efficiency is economic development. Think about the impact that can be made throughout Hamilton County if every building invested in a \$5,000 efficiency project that pays for itself. This will save customers money, create local jobs that can't be outsourced, reduce our country's dependence on foreign oil, and positively impact our carbon

footprint. As the County is investing in energy performance contracts to save taxpayer dollars in their own buildings, GCEA brings similar services to the private sector and looks forward to making a significant impact in the near future.